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THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF ART.

AN exhibition of American paintings is shortly to be held in New York under distinguished patronage, at which various prizes are to be awarded for the works which meet the highest approval of the designated judges, and the promoters of the exhibition expect that it will exert a most important influence for the encouragement of American art. It is strange that the unvaried experience of the past has not sufficed to show that the offer of prizes is not the way to get good pictures painted. There has been some experience of this sort in Philadelphia within a very few years, and it has been found that the offer of prizes failed utterly to stimulate competition among painters of rank and ability. The reason of this is plain. Even granting that the judges are such as to command confidence, so that a prize would be a recognized distinction, there are not many painters whose fortunes are sufficient to enable them to practice their art for glory alone. The beginners, who do not make a living by their art, may paint pictures for the chance of a prize, but the result will not be of great value. The capable men cannot afford to waste their time upon uncertainties.

People who complain of the smallness and unimportance of most of the work that is done in this country forget that no important work ever was done in any of the arts unless somebody wanted it done and was ready to pay for it. Michael Angelo and Raphael and the Venetians did all their great work under direct commission from the ecclesiastical and civic dignitaries of their time, and they never could have done it otherwise. All the most important of the modern work in Europe, in painting and sculpture, has been produced in a similar way, either by orders from intelligent patrons or by the certainty of finding a purchaser when the work was done. But an American painter seldom can afford to devote his time to a serious composition, for the simple reason that there is no sale for it, and he must paint what he can sell.

Mr. Hovenden never could have produced the very remarkable picture of John Brown, which has lately been attracting so much deserved attention, unless he had been commissioned to do so. The risk would have been too great, since the work necessarily interrupted the painting of the excellent but comparatively insignificant studies of every-day life, for which he finds a ready market. And Mr. Hovenden is only one of many capable artists whose achievement is limited by the discouraging conditions with which they are surrounded. They cannot even aspire to a Government purchase; for Congress, instead of giving commissions to painters or sculptors of repute, degrades the whole business to flagrant jobbery in which a self-respecting artist can have no part, while the extravagant purchases of foreign pictures by private collectors and even by public institutions are a direct discouragement.

If, instead of getting up exhibitions and offering prizes, some of our rich men would once in awhile give a liberal commission to a painter of approved ability, American art would not be lacking in serious and notable achievement.

The way to get good pictures painted is to want them, and to make it worth while for painters to produce them. This is the true meaning of art patronage. Riches cannot produce art, but they can foster it, and they can equally obstruct and oppress it. If there were more rich men in America with the good sense of the Hartford enthusiast for John Brown, there would be more American painters producing work of permanent value and importance.—*Phila. Times.*

DUTCH LOVE OF ART.

SAYS Pareval, referring to the love for art shown by the Dutch of the seventeenth century:

"There is no bourgeois so poor who does not liberally indulge his taste this way. A baker pays six hundred florins for a single figure by Van der Meer, of Delft. This, along with the neat and agreeable interior, constitutes their luxury. They do not grudge money in this direction, which they rather save on their stomachs."—*Taine's Art in the Netherlands.*

FRENCH INTEREST IN ART.

DURING the last fourteen years the French Government has expended more than two and a half millions of dollars in purchases from and commissions to artists. In addition to this, a large amount has been spent upon art education, for the results of which the United States pays many millions of dollars every year. How much has our government paid out for art works or art education in the same time?

RED TAPE IN FRANCE:

AN under-secretary of the Department of Fine Arts one day visited the manufactory at Sèvres. Entering a room, whose windows only gave a dull and niggardly light, he remarked to the director: "These windows are disgracefully dirty." He replied, "That is true on the outside, but observe how they shine on the inside."

"Very well," said the secretary, "let them be cleaned on the outside."

"Impossible," answered the director, "that is beyond our authority; the outside of the building belongs to the Department of Public Works; the Department of the Fine Arts has charge only of the interior of the building."

THE near approach of the spring exhibitions naturally brings the more or less dreaded critic to the front in the minds of the artists, which probably accounts for the receipt of several communications in which allusion is made to these gentlemen. There are a few of the art writers who really love art, and feel kindly towards the artists; but when a class is attacked of course the few exceptional individuals are never considered out. However, in our case no great harm is done to the critic, and the artist is pleased to score a small point in return for many received.

We learn on going to press that the sales at the Water Color Society's Exhibition were about \$4,000 in excess of those of last year, making some \$22,000, exclusive of more than \$2,000 worth of etchings sold.